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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003535

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY NATIONAL RECONCILIATION CONFERENCE
SPARKS IMPASSIONED DEBATE

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. The second of four national reconciliation conferences was held in Baghdad September 16-17. The conference, organized by the Ministries of State for National Dialogue and Civil Society Affairs, focused on the importance of civil society organizations in national reconciliation. On the first day, GOI officials, including the PM, addressed the approximately 800 attendees, emphasizing the need for unity and cooperation. Day two sparked impassioned debate, as Sunni and Shia argued over who should be included in reconciliation efforts, but then got back on track and produced a list of recommendations for civil society groups and NGOs. Six subcommittees produced recommendations for civil society organizations to use as guidance during the national reconciliation process. Several participants expressed disappointment with the conference for having too many speeches and too little action. End Summary.

Day One: Civil, but Ceremonial

¶2. (C) PM Nouri Al-Maliki opened the conference and attended the first day,s entire 2 hour and 20 minute session. He called civil society organizations partners in the reconciliation project, and asked them to share the responsibilities of reconstruction and development of the principles of freedom and democracy. Other speakers included Iraqi government officials and representatives of the NGO, Christian, Yazidi, Turkomen and Shabak communities.

¶3. (C) The first day's speeches were largely ceremonial, with little substantive content. Only one speaker, Tawafuq (Sunni bloc) CoR Member Hisham Al-Taiee, discussed concrete measures, such as dissolution of militias and commencement of constitutional review, needed to move the reconciliation effort forward.

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Day Two - Heated Exchange, Then Recommendations

¶4. (C) Day two featured more speeches, heavy on rhetoric and light on substance, from civil society activists. However, the conference took a dramatic turn when a panel convened to select subcommittee members. One attendee, addressing the panel, noted that before further discussion, the participants should clarify with whom the nation is reconciling. The panel dismissed the question on the grounds that such determinations should be left to the National Reconciliation Commission,s political parties subcommittee's future conference. The crowd, unsatisfied with that answer, grew agitated and began to push forward towards the microphones.

¶5. (C) One participant shouted that there needed to be a differentiation between the "resistance" and the terrorists. This prompted a young Shia cleric to leap from his seat and deliver an impassioned speech denouncing the resistance and calling all insurgents terrorists. "We do not want reconciliation with Baathists!" he yelled. Responses to this remark revealed that conference attendees had apparently self-segregated, with Sunnis seated on one side and Shia on the other. The two sides turned against one another, with the Sunnis chanting "No reconciliation with killers!" the Shia chanting "No, no to Baathists!" and both sides denouncing "terrorists." Conference participants from both sides surged forward, with the Shia cleric running onto the stage and commandeering the panel's microphone. Between 12 and 15 Iraqi police were called in to restore order.

¶6. (C) Minister of State for Civil Society Affairs Adel Al-Assedy made his way up to the stage and angrily addressed the crowd. He denounced behavior causing disorder, and shouted that anyone who loved Iraq should stay in their seats, but anyone who supported terrorists or the break up of Iraq should leave the room immediately. His words did little to calm the situation, and the room did not become quiet until Deputy PM Salam Zawbai took the stage in an effort to bring the conference back on track. After a 30 minute speech, frequently interrupted by questions and comments from the conference floor, the conference recessed for lunch.

¶7. (C) The conference got back on track after the break. The six subcommittees) trust building between NGOs and society, displacement issues, human rights awareness, rehabilitation of martyrs families and victims of violence, media and national dialogue and reconciliation, and civil society activities) met to discuss their issues and draft recommendations on the role NGOs can play in furthering

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national reconciliation.

Comments from Conference Participants

¶8. (C) Patience and Humanitarian Organization Chairwoman Ibteesam Jabr called the conference "nothing but decoration." She claimed that the lack of vision from the politicians showed that they were not truly committed to national reconciliation, and lamented the tremendous amount of resources that had been expended for such an empty purpose.

¶9. (C) Baghdad University Political Science professor Dr. Khamis Al-Badry told poloffs that the conference was "useless." He noted that the national reconciliation effort would never be successful while led by sectarian politicians with sectarian agendas. Conference speaker and CoR member Al-Taiee explained that the conference had invited "three types of people: those who wanted to reconcile, those who were ambivalent towards reconciliation, and those who wanted to fight," and expressed doubt that the upcoming political parties conference would be successful following this conference's failure.

Recommendations from the Subcommittees

¶10. (U) The final statement of the conference included the following recommendations for civil society institutions and NGOs:

- Work to establish symposiums and conference to strengthen the bonds of unity
- Broaden participation in the protection of public freedoms, human rights and promotion of concepts of partnership and cooperation
- Adopt collective development projects

- Adopt unified national social message
 - Call for weapons to be under exclusive control of government apparatuses
 - Activate Martyrs Foundation, Foundation of Prisoners and Families of Victims of the Former Regime and Victims of the Terrorist Operations
 - Renounce forced displacement and adopt the return of the displaced to their homes
 - Call for adoption of peaceful mechanisms, activities and objectives
 - Seek to be an example of freedom and independence
 - Reject fictitious organizations and organizations that support or foster terrorism; expose these organizations to the public and bring them to justice
 - Call on international NGOs and human rights organizations to support the people of Iraq and denounce violence, extremism and terrorism.
- SPECKHARD